

JEREMIAH WILLIAMS HOUSE  
Georgetown  
3035 Dumbarton Street, Northwest  
Washington  
District of Columbia

HABS DC-827  
*DC, GEO, 247-*

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FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### JEREMIAH WILLIAMS HOUSE

HABS NO. DC-827

Location: 3035 Dumbarton Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Present Owner: J. Carter Brown

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: The Jeremiah Williams House is outstanding example of the mid-nineteenth-century picturesque architectural style made popular by A.J. Downing and A.J. Davis through their publications and projects. The property's importance is further enhanced by its landscape by Rose Greely, an early woman landscape architect and the first one licensed in the District of Columbia.

#### PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

##### A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: It is generally accepted that Jeremiah Williams built on his Dumbarton Avenue property shortly after he purchased it in 1801. The wood frame Federal period house was then substantially altered in the mid to late nineteenth century. This evolution is based on limited evidence consisting of early nineteenth-century assessment records, city directories, and present appearance of the property. The assessment records and early to mid-nineteenth century city directories only establish that Williams was living in a house on this property. Given the rarity of frame Federal period houses and the absence of physical evidence, it seems as probable that the original house was demolished and a new house erected on the site, possibly reusing the foundations, in the mid-nineteenth century.

2. Original and subsequent owners: Robert Lyle, the late curator of the Peabody Room, Georgetown Branch, Martin Luther King Library wrote, in a June 25, 1986, letter:

According to DC Land Records Jeremiah Williams purchased property on the north side of Dumbarton Avenue running through to O Street in 1801 and presumably erected the house which still stands (see enclosure) as 3035-3037 Dumbarton Avenue. There is a deed made February 7, 1845 and recorded February 14, 1845 in Liber WB 114 folio 366, from William B. Boggs, et ex Ellen M (before her marriage called Ellen M. Carter, one of the children of Charles Carter) to Jeremiah Williams and William M. Stewart which reads William Boggs makes provision for his wife Ellen M. and puts in trust property

for her exclusive use including slaves, property in Fauquier Co. Va. which she will inherit from her father, and US Corporation Stock, etc.

The Dumbarton property was willed by Jeremiah to his wife Susan who in turn willed it in trust to Joshua Riley and Walter S. Cox for Ellen M. Boggs. Jeremiah's will was dated Jan. 17, 1857 and Susan's, March 17, 1858. Ellen died August 5, 1896 and according to probate records she was still residing on Dumbarton Avenue. She left the property to Mrs. Stewart Berry, Lawrence Boggs and the four children of her deceased son William, Jr.

As early as 1915 the large house had become a double residence. In the 1960's it was occupied by Richard L. Harkness a NBC correspondent and Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan, Jr. Today J. Carter Brown, Director of the National Gallery of Art, lives in the west half. (see correction below)

Mr. Lyle's findings should be supplemented with the following details:

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1902 | Equity Case #21703 docket 49<br>Katherine M. Berry and other defendants ordered by the Supreme Court of DC to sell property |
| 1903 | Deed (L2725 f 205) April 4th<br>John C. Heald et al trs.<br>To<br>Odell S. Smith  |
| 1903 | Deed (L2716 f 319) May 5th<br>Odell S. Smith<br>To<br>Clarence F. Norment   |
| 1903 | Deed (L2764 f 66) Sept. 23 <sup>rd</sup><br>Clarence F. Norment et ux<br>To<br>Edgar S. Kennedy (lots 103-111)              |
| 1922 | Deed (L4752 f 436) July 11 <sup>th</sup><br>Kennedy et ux<br>To<br>John H. Small et ux (lots 103-108)                       |
| 1945 | Deed (L 8125 f 432) June 29 <sup>th</sup><br>Isabella C. Small & Bank of Washington   |

To  
Richard Harkness (lots 103-108)

1977      Deed (microfiche card, Room 304 Recorder of Deeds)  
            August 5th  
            Harkness heirs and widow  
To  
John C. Brown (lots 103-108)

Attempts by this researcher to trace the chain of title backwards from 1903 to 1801 (the date cited by Mr. Lyle) were unsuccessful. The 1845 deed WB 114 folio 366 referred to by Lyle does not mention this property. It should also be noted that a photocopy of a newspaper article in the HABS file on this property states that "The home of the late Mrs. Helen Boggs, with surrounding ground, containing over 64,000 square feet has been sold Mr. Edward F. Abner. The property has frontage on two streets- Dumbarton avenue and O Street- and Mr. Abner intends to improve it to a considerable extent. The ground will be cut down to a grade more inform with other property in the vicinity and the house will be remodeled and repaired for a home for Mr. Abner and his family." Neither the name, page, nor date of the paper is on the copy, but a handwritten date of 1902/08/04 is in the right corner (It is assumed that the newspaper meant Ellen rather than Helen Boggs.) It appears impossible, at this time, to reconcile this newspaper account with the deed records.

The 1822 and 1830 city directories listed Williams as dwelling in Georgetown. The 1834 directory places him on the north side of Dumbarton Street.

The 1800-1807 assessment shows Jeremiah Williams owning three improved lots on Dumbarton Street and three unimproved lots on Bealls St. The next assessment, 1808-1813, provides more specific information, specifically that lot 75 is improved and appraised at 800, while lot 76 is also improved but appraised at 2500. In the 1813-1815 assessment, lot 75 is described as frame and brick and valued at 3000, while lot 76 is only 300 and listed as vacant. The 1813-1818 assessment repeats the disparity between lot 75 valued at 3000 and the vacant lot 76 at 500.

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: No information available.
4. Original plans and construction: No information available.
5. Alterations and additions: The early twentieth-century modifications made by Edgar Kennedy are documented in building permits. The mid and late twentieth-century changes made by Richard Harkness and J. Carter Brown are documented in the Commission of Fine Arts files as well as in building permits. But no documentation has surfaced concerning the substantial nineteenth-century alterations and additions that created the basic structure that exists today. The efforts of Kennedy involved additions to the rear kitchen wing and shoring up the walls,

while Brown also made alterations to the rear, most importantly installing an elevator and enlarging the garage, with a connection to the house. Harkness added the Rose Greely landscape on the east side of the house in the late 1940s.

#### B. Historical Context:

While this documentation is limited to 3035 Dumbarton, it should be noted that this structure abuts 3037 Dumbarton, they were one structure until the early twentieth century (as noted by Robert Lyle, see above), and that the property always consisted of several quite long, rather narrow parcels running from Dumbarton Avenue (once Street) to O Street (once Beall Street). At one point, in the late nineteenth century the parcels were partitioned, no doubt with the intent to sell the frontage along Dumbarton Avenue off, but this never occurred. (The same partitioning happened at Tudor Place, see HABS No. DC-171.)

3035 and 3037 Dumbarton share the same stairs up from the sidewalk until the stairs bifurcate and the current appearance suggests that the larger house (3035) was always the main house and small house (3037) might have even been servants' quarters. Although smaller, 3037 has had prominent residents, Supreme Court Associate Justice William Brennan and is currently owned by writer Kitty Kelly. (It is a common error to list Brennan at 3035 as Mr. Lyle did in his letter, but the Supreme Court Curator's Office confirmed 3037 Dumbarton as his residence.) Despite current appearances, the assessments of 1813 through 1819 suggest that the parcel that is now 3037 was much valuable than its eastern section, what is now 3035. This disparity between nineteenth-century assessment and twentieth-century appearance again points out the very substantial extent of the changes both houses have undergone and the inability to describe the original structure on the parcels that are now 3035 Dumbarton (106 Dumbarton in the mid-nineteenth century).

One architectural historian, reflecting the commonly held view, described this house "as being a surviving wooden frame house of modest origins in Georgetown. The house is also significant as it clearly physically reflects the many changes it has gone through, from a modest three-bay harbor master's house to a substantially enlarged mid and late-nineteenth century villa, with attached brick tenant house." (quoted from draft of HABS report). There is not documentation to support this description and in fact, the assessment records suggest a very different early nineteenth-century appearance. Whether Jeremiah Williams, the presumed first owner, was also a harbor-master is unknown, but he did have a company, Jeremiah Williams & Co. that owned warehouses and wharves, so he was a merchant. Later city directories list him as a senior clerk at the auditor's office in the Department of Treasury so like others of Georgetown substantial property owners he combined a government sinecure with being a merchant or retailer. (As Williams was a member of Christ Church, perhaps its records will provide additional information on him, but at present it was not possible to review those records.)

Albert Boschke's "Topographical Map of the District of Columbia, Surveyed in the Years 1856-59" shows a house at the location of present day 3035-3037 Dumbarton Avenue. At approximately the same time of Boschke's survey, Jeremiah Williams and his wife died and the house became the home their adapted daughter, Ellen, and her husband the artist William Benton Boggs, who was also a Navy paymaster and a vestryman of Christ Church.

It seems reasonable to assume that the Boggs remodeled or rebuilt substantially the house when they acquired it in the late 1850s or early 1860s and used the then current picturesque style.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: William Pierson in *American Buildings And Their Architects: Technology and the Picturesque, The Corporate and the Early Gothic Styles* (Anchor Books Edition, 1980) wrote "The cottage, as first seen in *Rural Residences* and as later developed by Davis, was, in effect, a combination of these two earlier forms. By enlarging the projecting central pavilion of the late colonial type to an equivalent of a classical temple front, Davis created a new type of cross relationship in which the two blocks interpenetrated one another to form a two-directional system that in its spatial implications was not unlike the cruciform massing of the medieval church. Moreover, in Davis's scheme the depressed triangle of the classical pediment gave way to a steeply pitched, broadly projecting gable, open at the bottom, and ornamented on the sloping sides by a verge board carved in tracery-like patterns." (page 307) Pierson's description of the tense pulling of the exterior in two cross directions, an effect created by the verge boards, exactly fits 3035 Dumbarton Avenue with its major gable facing east and a slightly smaller one facing south.

Pierson, in contrasting the picturesque cottage and villa ---as promoted by A.J. Davis in the mid-nineteenth century--- to its predecessors, the classical revival and colonial architecture, did not address one substantial difference quite apparent at 3035 Dumbarton Avenue. In the earlier phases of American domestic architecture, as seen in Georgetown, the stairs is a major design element. Even when the stairs is not dramatic, it dominates the highly visible space in the central hall and is the focus of anyone entering the house. But at 3035 Dumbarton Avenue, the stair is tucked in the corner of the entrance hall and not even visible when one first enters the hall. In this house, not only is the stairs relegated to a secondary position, but the organization of space no longer follows the colonial precedent, seen in the other Georgetown houses, of rooms flanking the central hall, running the depth of the house.

By exterior stylistic details, exterior cross axis, and organization space, 3035 Dumbarton Avenue is a major departure from the earlier Georgetown residential architecture.

2. Condition of fabric: The house and gardens are in excellent condition. Mr. Brown had to replace rotted verge board sections with new wood replicating the original forms.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The house has a nearly square main block, with a kitchen wing addition at the rear. This wing extends the east edge of the main block nearly to the garage, but the west facade of the wing is not as wide as the main block so the house and wing create a squat L. The abutting house lacks the massing and height so it appears as an attached wing on the west. But is apparent from either the front or rear yards that these houses are under separate ownership and occupancy.

2. Foundations: Ruble and brick foundations can be seen in the basement. The porch sits on a brick foundation.

3. Walls: The walls are covered in novelty siding, done in wide boards. A pent-roof pergola runs along the east facade of the kitchen wing.

4. Structural system, framing: The system is heavy timber framing and the posts in the basement are tree trunks, without their bark.

5. Porches, stoops: The porch, which is a major design element, runs from the projecting dining room windows on the east facade to the projecting entrance hall windows on the south facade. The ceiling of the porch is incised tongue and groove paneling supported by joists ending in scrolled millwork at the eave. The joists, which form a strong visual rhythm as one looks up at the ceiling of the porch, rest on beams, which in turn are supported by the scrolled bracket capitals of the porch columns. An interesting feature of the ceiling is that close to the house the joists angle into the soffit, marking a change in the planes of the underside of the roof of the porch. In its visual interest and complexity this porch is an excellent example of the picturesque style and reminiscent of such outstanding exemplars of the porch in this style, such as A.J. Davis's Lyndhurst in Tarrytown, NY. The porch has two flights of a wooden stairs, the major flight leading from the east lawn to the front door, and the secondary flight terminates at the north end leading to the rear of the house. The major stairs and the porch have a simple balustrade of unornamented upper and lower rails and square (in plan) balusters.

6. Chimneys: Two major chimneys are along the west wall of the house. The chimneys have a lower or base section with recessed panels. Above the base, the rectangular chimney rises to a dentiled cap. Two small, probably twentieth-century chimneys are in the kitchen wing. With only two chimneys in the main block of the house major rooms such as the dining room are without a fireplace.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front door is one of the house's most important decorative elements. It is a double door with each leaf having a square lower panel and a tall arched upper panel. The edges of each panel is defined by a series beading, suggestive of crown molding and in the center of each panel is a raised block repeating the shape of the panel. There is also a substantial astragal. Above the doors, the arched transom window has a naturalistic etched glass design. The door header, with arched intradoes, runs into and is absorbed by the soffit of the porch. The header is supported by consoles ending in wide incised pendants. Below the consoles and pendants, the door jambs have raised panels echoing the detailing of the door leaves, but the panel on the right jamb is divided vertically by a small block for the door bell. The door surrounds terminate in bases. (For a similar main door surround bracket see HABS No. DC-837)

The second door on the east facade, into the kitchen wing, is a lesser version of the main door into that its header is also arched. There also two minor doors on the rear, one to the elevator and the other to the basement stairs.

b. Windows: The windows are arched with the exception of some under the gable and those in the enclosed sleeping porch. Most windows are also two over two sash windows with the exception of the picture window on the south facade, the windows on the east facade's dining room bay which are French doors, and the smaller windows on both facades, which have horizontally rather than vertically divided sash.

#### 8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The T-shaped roof has a front gable running parallel to the street (east-west) and, therefore, the rear gable runs north-south. In front of the front gable is the cross gable of the third floor. These major roofs are covered in slate while the roof over the sleeping porch (now converted to library) has a standing seam metal roof.

b. Cornice, eaves: Deep eaves exist with scalloped ended roof joists stopping just short of the gutters running along the eaves.

Two distinctive and highly ornamented verge boards are on the front gable and east gable. Like the soffit joists of the porch, and roof joists beneath the eaves, and the scalloped brackets of the porch columns and door surrounds, these verge boards cast strong, intricate shadows across the house's major facades, which is characteristic of the picturesque style. This desire to cast often irregular shadows parallels that other characteristic of this mid-nineteenth century architectural style --- to create strong, irregular silhouettes against the sky, often within an imprecise balancing of masses.

The south verge board has a king post pediment with scalloped drop pendant and quarterfoils within circles between the diagonal and center posts of the pediment. The ends of the pediment are marked by simpler drop pendants. Beyond each pendant is a panel verge board



with a sinuous line the length of the board, and above and below the line are vaguely fleur-de-lies cutouts. This panel also ends in the same simpler pendant.

By contrast, the east verge board has a lighter, later feel, closer to the stick style architecture of the later nineteenth century. The drop pendants have been replaced with the pyramidal caps of the ribs of the verge board and the panels between the ribs have finer, tighter circles and other decorations, creating finer shadow liners than the south verge board.

c. Dormers: There is one dormer on the north side. It has a pediment repeating the tracery of the east verge board and it has deep eaves with scalloped ends on the joists.

### C. Description of the Interior:

#### 1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: The basement has an irregular plan, which in the opinion of the owner, J. Carter Brown, suggests that the original Federal period house was a square with the front door facing Dumbarton Avenue and that the house was later expanded to the east, bays added, and expanded in the kitchen. Evidence of early construction includes the tree trunk posts and an early interior door with a H and L hinge and a wrought iron loop on the door jamb. It appears that the basement in an early period had a secured storage room intended to keep servants or slaves out or perhaps it was basement slave quarters. Within this storage room, at the north end of the west wall is a large bricked-in arch, which Mr. Brown believes was the fireplace for the original kitchen.

b. First floor: The front doors open onto a square entrance hall with stairs along the south and west walls and openings to the drawing room, which is west of the entrance hall, and to the dining room, which is north of the entrance hall. North of the drawing room is the library and both rooms are of the same size. Openings connect the drawing room and library and library and dining room. The dining room has the same width as the library, but greater depth. A rectangular kitchen wing, with bathroom, pantry, laundry, and kitchen, is connected to the main block through the dining room.

c. Second and third floors have rooms opening off of the east-west corridor. On the second floor, the rear annex consists of a series of small rooms, including a bathroom, and library in what was probably originally a sleeping porch.

2. Stairway: The first run of the stairs starts at the southeast corner of the entrance hall and has a short run along the south wall. (As noted earlier, there was once a window along this section of wall, which apparently was covered when the stairs were built.) The main run of the stairs is along the east wall, between the first and second floors and between the second and third floors. The stairs, open-well and open string, are most notable for the curved railing and ornate newel and balusters. The newel is quite similar to the octagonal newel in Calvert Vaux's *Villas*

& Cottages (page 70 in the Dover paperback edition, 1970), except that Vaux's has a pineapple cap and the one at Dumbarton terminates in a series of circles with a button in the center. Also Dumbarton, unlike the Vaux illustration, has balusters with concave fluted base and middle shaft separated by turned vase sections, ending with turned tapers (where there is sufficient height). The string, which is damaged in some sections, consists of simple abstract, naturalistic shapes.

At the top of the stairs, a glass paneled door with nineteenth-century hardware separates the stairs from the third floor corridor.

The house lacks a secondary or servants stairs.

Stairs to the basement are beneath the first floor stairs, and there is an outside stairs in the rear to the basement.

3. Flooring: The floors are covered in narrow width oak boards, except for the kitchen wing which has tiles and the third floor which has wide floor boards, which could be original.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings were plaster, with several rooms having nineteenth-century wallpaper or at least nineteenth-century patterns. In the attic space there appears to be the oldest wallpaper along the west wall. Mr. Brown thought it was mid-nineteenth century. The baseboards have a cyma recta molding and are nearly identical in each first floor room. By comparison, the cornices vary from the simple concave dining room crown molding, with unornamented banding, to the drawing room and library crown molding which consist of two cyma recta sections. The profiles of the moldings in these two rooms are quite different, with the parlor appearing older and less well executed. The library appears to be a twentieth-century fabrication. The most complex and probably oldest cornice is in the entrance hall, where the lowest band is convex, decorated with naturalistic forms (that are hard to identify due to numerous paint layers) and largely unornamented friezes run above that band. One slight projection and one glyph separate the friezes.

#### 5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The interior side of the front door repeats the paneling seen on the exterior, except each panel is square or rectangular, without arched top and without a projecting section within the center of the panel. A second door separates the small vestibule from the entrance hall and this door has a large single piece of glass in the upper half of the door with six recessed panels in the lower half. A similar door is at the top of the stairs, except below the glass is a recessed horizontal panel and beneath that panel two recessed vertical panels. The outside kitchen door is nearly identical to this door. Two other doors merit discussion. Both have H and L hinges and are in the basement and the third floor. The basement one is a batten door (without diagonals), while the third floor door has six panels (and the bottom hinge is an H hinge). The doors and alcoves have surrounds that appear mid-nineteenth century in that they have heavy profiles consisting of several rows of bead molding.

b. Windows: The window treatments are consistent with the door surrounds. An interesting feature of the windows is the fillet on the mullions. The dining room windows have two sets of shutters which fold into the wall reveal.

6. Decorative features and trim: The parlor and library fireplaces are identical; white marble surrounding an arched opening, with carved flowers and vines in the pendentives and a central cartouche of grapes, leaf, and stylized bird, with a section of volute at the top, the volute curve repeated on either side, and the bottom detailed in eggs. The edges of the pendentives are marked by convex molding, while the sides of the fireplace opening have concave shapes defined by convex molding. The outside vertical edges of the fireplace are defined by boltels. The mantel shelf which curves out at the edges and above the cartouche has a cyma reversa molding.

In the entrance hall, the wall beneath the diagonal run of the stairs is decorated with a two-part molding. Close to the door a vertical molding strip runs from the baseboard to the string. To the right of that strip, separated by wallpaper, is a trapezoid demarcated by an edge of half-round moldings, and this edge border is repeated at a smaller circumference, and finally another band of half-round molding demarcates the trapezoid's inner which is also wallpapered. Each band is separated by a frieze.

7. Hardware: Beyond the hinges mentioned above, the only nineteenth-century hardware appeared to be a lockbox on the third floor, the wrought iron door loop in the basement, and perhaps some upper floor window latches.

8. Mechanical systems: The first floor of the main block of the house is heated by a number of tall iron radiators.

#### D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The parcel is substantially above the street level, necessitating bifurcated stairs up to the house. In the rear, the alley to underground garages is also several feet below the rear yard. The stairs on the right up to 3035 Dumbarton and the stairs on the left up to 3037 Dumbarton provide a gradual transition from the urban character of Georgetown (and the street and sidewalk in front of the house) to the rustic setting of the stairs and houses. The split in the stairs also reinforces that the two houses, although joined, are separate residences. With its pebbled stucco walls and black tall lights, the stairs has a nineteenth-century amusement park ambiance. Although the house appears oriented to the street (south) because of its front verge board, the entrance faces east and the greater length of the house faces the east. In keeping with this orientation, the garden designed by Rose Greely is east of the house and besides providing a highly attractive view from the house and place to relax, the Greely landscape provides a smooth transition from the climb up the stairs to the front steps. Because of the substantial height of the parcel, the great set back from the street (approximately

75 feet), and multiple runs of the front stairs, and the landscaped sideyard, 3035 Dumbarton has an emotive processional from sidewalk to front door that is rare in Georgetown.

2. Historic landscape design: Unknown.

3. Outbuildings: The upper story and gable roof of the underground garage is the only outbuilding.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Much of the information for this property was taken from an existing file that consisted of letters, notations, and newspaper articles compiled by the staff of the Peabody Room of the Georgetown branch of the D.C. Public Library. That file also contained copies of a newspaper article and notations probably by Pamela Scott. Additional research was done by Lebovich at the D.C. Recorder of Deeds, the National Archives, the Historical Society of Washington, and the Martin Luther King Branch of the D.C. Public Library. The real estate maps and general assessments were the most helpful materials consulted by Lebovich.

Prepared by: Bill Lebovich, architectural historian, February 2000

### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Georgetown Documentation Project was sponsored by the Commission of Fine Arts and undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service. Principals involved were Charles H. Atherton, Secretary, U.S. Commission of Fine Arts, and E. Blaine Cliver, Chief, HABS/HAER. The documentation was undertaken in two phases. The summer 1998 team was supervised by John P. White, FAIA, Professor of Architecture, Texas Tech University; and architecture technicians Robert C. Anderson, Boston Architectural Center; Aimee Charboneau, Tulane University; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Adam Maksay, United States/International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS) architect from the Transylvania Trust. Historic research was initiated by Bryan C. Green, historian, Richmond, Virginia, during this summer. The summer 1999 team was supervised by Roger S. Miller, architect, Alexandria, Virginia, and architecture technicians David Benton, The Catholic University of America; Edward Byrde, The Catholic University of America; Irwin J. Gueco, The Catholic University of America; and Clara Albert, US/ICOMOS architect from the Transylvania Trust. The project historian, and author of the written reports, was William Lebovich, architectural historian, Chevy Chase, Maryland. The photography was undertaken by Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographer, and James Rosenthal, photographic assistant.